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TAGS: KS KN PGOV PREL
SUBJECT: PRESIDENT-ELECT LEE MEETS FORMER USG OFFICIALS
ABOUT NORTH KOREA AND ALLIANCE

Classified By: AMB Alexander Vershbow. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) Summary: During a January 4 meeting with former Secretary of Defense William Perry and other former senior

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USG officials, President-elect Lee Myung-bak said that:

-- The DPRK government was feeling "tremendous uncertainty" after Lee's election and consequently had a wait-and-see attitude on the nuclear issue, on relations with the ROK, and on relations with the U.S.

-- The risk, which the ROK, U.S. and Japan should work together to avoid, was that the DPRK would pull back from engaging what it saw as a more hardline ROKG and a late-term Bush administration.

-- The key to resolving the nuclear issue was to have Kim Jong-il gain confidence that he could retain power after denuclearization, "but he still doesn't feel confident enough," and relations with the U.S. were crucial to that end.

-- While information on the inner workings of the DPRK was deficient, Kim Jong-il appeared to have a close, mutually beneficial relationship with the military.

End Summary.

FOCUS ON NORTH KOREA

¶2. (U) President-elect Lee Myung-bak and key advisors including Rep. Chung Mong-joon and foreign policy advisor Rep. Park Jin met with a delegation of former senior USG officials led by former SecDef William Perry on January 4. Others participating on the U.S. side were former Ambassador to the UN Kenneth Adelman, former Ambassador to Croatia Peter Galbraith, Dean of Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service Robert Gallucci, University of California Professor emeritus Robert Scalapino, former Congressman Steven Solarz, and former EAP Assistant Secretary of State and Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz. The Ambassador also

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participated and Poloff attended as notetaker.

¶3. (C) The bulk of the discussion was on North Korea, with

Lee responding to the delegation's comments and suggestions. Former SecDef Perry led off by stressing that an integrated ROK-U.S.-Japanese approach to the DPRK nuclear issue had been key to progress in the 1990s, suggesting that Lee revive such close cooperation to counter the DPRK's penchant to delay and seek to renegotiate. He recalled the effectiveness of senior Presidential envoys in the late 1990s as an idea to be considered again in dealing with the DPRK.

-- DPRK's wait-and-see attitude

¶4. (C) Lee responded that he agreed with Perry's points, adding that "strong ROK-U.S. relations based on mutual trust and cooperation" were essential. He noted that it was unfortunate that the DPRK had missed the December 31 deadline for submitting its nuclear declaration. The DPRK had yet to make an official statement about Lee's election, which led him to believe that the DPRK had adopted a "wait-and-see attitude" about the incoming ROK government's approach to the DPRK and its relations with the U.S. The risk was that the DPRK would decide to delay because of what it saw as a hardline ROK administration, with close relations to the U.S.

The DPRK could also take a wait-and-see attitude toward the U.S., expecting a better offer from a new U.S. administration. Therefore, Lee said, it was important for both Democratic and Republican candidates to make clear that the DPRK had no alternative to denuclearization; he reiterated this point later in the discussion. Wolfowitz responded that a firm ROKG position toward the DPRK would gain immediate respect from both U.S. parties.

¶5. (C) Scalapino said that key issues for denuclearization were verification of the DPRK's (prospective) denuclearization actions and synchronizing those actions with responses from the Five Parties. Since the DPRK's only bargaining chip was its nuclear weapons, it was very sensitive, and inflexible, about receiving corresponding rewards for each step toward denuclearization. In addition,

the lack of reliable information about the DPRK system in general and Kim Jong-il (KJI) in particular was a serious problem for policymakers. Scalapino asked Lee for his assessment of KJI's relationship with the DPRK military. Adelman later suggested that Lee emphasize professionalization of the ROK's National Intelligence Service (NIS) to address the information gap.

-- Need for Regime Security

¶6. (C) Lee noted the lack of reliable information on the DPRK. He said he surmised that the "military was in the center of decision-making," as evidenced by KJI's title as Chairman of the National Defense Commission. It was in the military's interest to have KJI continue in power, looking out for the military's interests, and also in KJI's interest to have the military "prop up" his regime. If KJI had confidence that he could remain in power after denuclearization, that would help, "but he still doesn't feel confident enough." Lee said he was not sure how to resolve this difficulty, but that the U.S. relationship with the DPRK was key. He suggested that, along with continuing the Six-Party Talks, perhaps the U.S., ROK and DPRK "can engage in talks to give (the DPRK) a security guarantee," He later agreed with Adelman's and the Ambassador's point that the U.S. could not guarantee the survival of the regime, which ultimately depended on KJI undertaking reforms.

¶7. (C) Returning to the issue of the DPRK's uncertain attitude, Lee said that the DPRK saw the incoming ROK government as "not so friendly," and was concerned that the Lee administration would have stronger relations with the U.S., which made the DPRK "uneasy." Lee said that he hoped the USG would keep these circumstances in mind as it formulated policy. He later mentioned drawing on Libya's experience with giving up its nuclear programs as a possible model for the DPRK, saying it was a better example than that of the Ukraine.

¶8. (C) Gallucci said that in addition to the DPRK needing confidence that its regime would survive, another issue was how far the U.S. and others were willing to go to provide rewards for denuclearization. The U.S. and others needed to be clear that they were providing everything promised to the DPRK "plus a little more." On the other hand, South-North cooperation had to proceed in step with progress on denuclearization or else the DPRK would get the wrong signal.

He added that normalizing relations between the U.S. and the DPRK, if denuclearization proceeded, would require political, economic and human rights progress in the DPRK.

-- Message to DPRK

¶9. (C) Lee said that his message to the DPRK was that if it would fully dismantle its nuclear weapons, which would need to be verified, then the ROK, U.S., Japan and China would provide any needed assistance. The ROK in particular would work to raise DPRK per capita GDP to USD 3000 per year (from about USD 800 now, according to the OECD) within a decade. The USD 3000 figure was important, he said, because at that point North Koreans would "open their eyes" to human rights issues and political freedom. (Note: Lee has elsewhere noted that the ROK's democratic development surged when the ROK reached annual USD 3000 per capita income in the 1980s. End Note.) He added that a denuclearized DPRK would have no choice but "openness, change and reform." China and the ROK would be its economic models.

-- Importance of Human Rights

¶10. (C) Former Congressman Steven Solarz focused on human rights issues in the DPRK, suggesting four policy steps: providing the ROK's humanitarian assistance through the World Food Program or insisting on more effective monitoring of its disposition; require that ROK companies at the Kaesong Industrial Complex pay their DPRK workers directly (rather than the present payment to DPRK authorities); linking increased tourism to increased DPRK forthcomingness on South Korean and Japanese abductees; pressing the Chinese government to cease repatriating defectors to the DPRK; and voting in favor of UN resolutions about DPRK human rights issues. Wolfowitz added that the U.S. and ROK should announce a readiness to resettle about 5000 North Korean

defectors per year, putting pressure on China to improve its treatment of them.

¶11. (C) While not replying to Solarz's suggestions directly, Lee said that he knew that the U.S. was already resettling some defectors and agreed with Wolfowitz's point that more such resettlement would put pressure on the Chinese -- and the DPRK -- governments. Lee said that his human rights policy toward the DPRK would be based on the fact that such rights are universal values that must be upheld, rather than as a political tactic directed at criticizing the DPRK.

-- Importance of Alliance

¶12. (C) At several points during the meeting, Lee emphasized the importance of close working relations between the U.S. and ROK, including with the former officials at this meeting, to work through the issues raised. He said that it was important to "realign" U.S.-ROK relations based on the same national interests. The ROK-U.S. alliance should focus not only on the nuclear issue but also on "Northeast Asia peace and stability, global terrorism, proliferation (of WMD), and drug trafficking," which were all global issues.

¶13. (SBU) At the outset of the meeting, Lee greeted each participant warmly with a handshake. He appeared relaxed when he spoke, taking notes in pencil when others were speaking. He seemed to understand much of the commentary in English, although he relied on an interpreter.

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